

Strike Back

Bulletin of the Hackney Anti-Fascist Collective

June 1994

BNP down but not out in East London

The failure of the BNP to hang on to their only council seat in Britain is clearly something to celebrate. However, Derek Beackon's election defeat in Tower Hamlets does not mean the end of the fascists – the BNP now have a growing number of hardcore supporters in East London and it must be recognised that a large number of working-class people, including many youth, have identified themselves with fascism as a means of solving their problems.

The idea that spread following Beackon's election victory that Isle of Dogs residents were registering a protest does not stand up to examination when we know that he won an extra 600 votes this time. Similarly, in other parts of Tower Hamlets and in the neighbouring borough of Newham the fascist candidates also won an impressive number of votes.

The votes aside, one area where the fascists did win was on the streets – they were able to conduct their election campaign with very little harassment and seemed to be in more danger of attack from ex-friends in C18 than anyone else.

It was clear that for the Labour Party and its supporters within the ANL and ARA (plus sadly the leadership of the YRE) the idea of actually physically stopping the fascists was not even an option.

Injured

Such a policy will, undoubtedly continue into the foreseeable future (YRE excepted). Some ANL members are paying the consequence for this and are being attacked and injured – we predict that even more will get hurt, in some cases killed, unless the ANL/SWP abandons this stance.

Hackney Anti-Fascist Collective, along with other organisations, argued that the fascists should be stopped from

EDITORIAL

distributing their literature – peacefully if possible, violently if not. We attempted to organise a coalition of groups and individuals to carry this out. We felt we were not strong enough to directly confront the fascists on our own but we did decide to organise a Labour movement rally at ASDA on the Isle of Dogs on the Saturday before the election. Earlier that morning we also joined with Newham Monitoring Project in leafletting shopping areas and estates in Newham.

Initially, we had Labour MPs and prospective councillors rushing to phone and confirm that they wanted to speak but when they realised that we were actually having the rally at the spot and time where the fascists had on previous Saturdays sold newspapers and distributed leaflets, they all ducked for cover.

Mildred Gordon MP had her secretary phone and ask us to cancel the rally, fearing trouble. Meanwhile, the ANL and its chief bureaucrat Julie Waterson turned up to speak to the press and rubbish the whole event. SWP/ANL leaders had told members to stay away.

In the end, just over 100 people turned up, we held our rally, we denied Beackon the opportunity of speaking to an Italian TV crew and we were able to hold an impromptu march around the Isle of Dogs.

The fascists, who had called for a southern mobilisation, attracted around 80, who made what can only be described as a feeble attempt to get near to us. The feeling was that we were more than capable of holding our own if there had been any bother.

These initial developments, however, paid off handsomely a few days'

later when members of HAFC, Anarchists, YRE, Workers Power and other groups worked closely with each other in the area of York Hall in Bethnal Green.

When around 25 fascists turned up with the aim of attacking the picket outside the election count they were met by a small but combative group – resembling the the situation in Brick Lane last September when fascists were scattered by a group of less than 20 people. One went to hospital.

When six more turned up later they were chased off. When we were forced on to the picket we worked with others to refuse access to local racists and fascists – even the ANL stewards joined in at this point! The icing on the cake was to see Derek 'Dancing Boy' Beackon stumble on the Town Hall steps when he came out. Not much "bottle" there!

Challenge

It has to be said that members of HAFC, the people we worked with and the people that came with us that evening are not "hard men or women" but recognise that if fascism is to be stopped then a physical response is needed to the BNP and fascists – we need to challenge them physically and ideologically and where possible we will do both.

It is hoped that the work carried out by different groups around London during the election period can continue in the future and meetings to plan this are currently being arranged.

Most of HAFC's work is in the field of anti-fascism but we are also keen generally to develop links with those in the anti-racist movement – the struggle against fascism cannot be divorced from the struggle against racism in jobs, housing, education and life in general. HAFC is also committed to building support for the victims of racist immigration laws.

HACKNEY UNISON

Number 1 BRANCH
219 Mare Street, London E8 3QH
tel: 081-985 7134

PRESS RELEASE

Council workers take stand against racist laws

Hackney Benefits Staff refuse to operate new government restrictions

For Immediate Release

6 June 1994

At a mass meeting on 27 May 1994, Hackney Council Housing Benefits workers voted to boycott new racist government legislation about "Persons From Abroad".

The effect of the legislation is to place an obligation on Council employees to check the immigration status of all benefit claimants not already on income support. This means checking their passports and liaising with the Home Office about their cases ... inevitably targeting black migrants, and making a mockery of confidentiality and of Equal Opportunities. The effect of the policy will be to strike fear into the hearts of all black people in Hackney who apply for their legitimate entitlement to benefits.

Branch Publicity Officer said: "This legislation has been brought in by the Government with negligible opposition from the Labour Party either nationally or locally. We believe it is thoroughly racist - just another stage in the present government's ongoing attacks on migrants, especially those with black skins. At a time of mass slaughter in Bosnia, in Rwanda and in other parts of the world, yet more restrictions on the rights of refugees are totally indefensible. And what makes the government's actions worse is that all migrants who claim benefits - not just the "illegals" they claim to be targeting - will suffer under this legislation, because of the fear, uncertainty and delays that it will create.

"The benefits workers who would have to implement the legislation are determined not to work as immigration officers for a racist system. They believe that the new legislation can be beaten, if enough people take a stand against it. If the Council is serious about its commitment to Equal Opportunities it will back what the benefits workers are doing, but in any case their example will give a lead to benefits workers in the same situation at other local authorities. If enough people join in by taking similar action, it will be possible to tap into the massive resentment against racist immigration laws and procedures, and to defeat the government's policy.

Fascists challenged

Despite Derek Beackon losing his seat on the Isle of Dogs, the number of votes cast in support of the British National Party in the East End has increased.

Last September just seven votes that secured Derek Beackon's election victory. With more than half the electorate choosing not to vote, presumably because of their lack of faith in the existing political parties, a handful of people were able to ensure the BNP a high media profile and an air of credibility.

Since that success, increasingly confident fascists have dressed in suits and ties and peddled their racist filth to a wider public.

For militant anti-fascists, the past nine months have been busy. Much time and energy has been spent challenging and on several occasions successfully disrupting fascist paper sales, "concerts" and attempts at electioneering.

Our belief in fighting fascism in all its forms led us to the polling stations on 5 May. As election day grew closer many of us felt uncomfortable about our role on the day.

Fascism grows in capitalist societies in crisis. In Britain, the crisis we are experiencing today is as much the fault of the Labour Party as the Tories. The Labour Party has consistently

failed to address the needs of working-class people and has offered nothing fundamentally different from the other main parties.

Our ideological challenge to the fascists before election day was to argue "DON'T VOTE BNP" through leaflets, rallies and via the media. On the day itself, however, the argument was amended to "DON'T VOTE BNP - BUT DO VOTE - AND VOTE LABOUR".

If the confidence of the fascists was to be knocked, they had to lose their foothold in the Isle of Dogs. Tower Hamlets groups such as CAPA and Women Unite Against Racism coordinated a network of drivers and escorts to support and ferry anti-BNP voters to polling stations. In conjunction with the local Labour Party, others were sent to knock-up pledged Labour supporters and to leaflet outside the stations.

The result of this activity was a 70% turnout of voters and a defeat for the BNP. Even The Guardian recognised this high turnout was due to "impressive mobilisation by the local community and political activists".

It makes a welcome change to hear political activity described as "impressive" and obviously there is relief that we had not wasted our time on election day. On this page are accounts

from some of the drivers and escorts around the polling stations on 5 May.

The accounts describe fascist intimidation on the streets - the same intimidation which will be happening daily as the press pursue their next "big" story.

For those of us committed to confronting fascism both ideologically and physically, these brief accounts should act as a reminder that fascism is rooted in collective intimidation:

Boneheads

With the May election now over and many celebrating their success at the BNP's "defeat", it is essential that the intimidation described here must still be challenged physically if fascism is to be halted.

The boneheads kept a fairly low profile during their party's election campaign and they may continue to do so until the Euro elections on 9 June, when John Tyndall is standing for the BNP in Dagenham.

Up to and beyond that time, however, racist attacks and harassment will continue. The result of their campaigning may not have secured them success at the ballot box, but it has swelled their numbers of openly racist supporters on the streets. It is here, therefore, that we must continue to challenge their presence.

'I was videoed by the BNP'

"I went to Cubitt Town polling station on Manchester Road, Isle of Dogs, having been sent there because information was that significant numbers of BNP supporters were gathering at the polling stations in that area.

I cycled down to the area and found the whole place very quiet. However, at the polling station there was a different atmosphere. There were two groups of BNP - one group either side of the entrance with three or four in each group.

A little further to each side a group of Labour/anti-fascist supporters were leafletting. Two Liberty observers

were at the entrance to the station, along with one and then later two uniformed police.

I stayed from about 3.30pm to 5.45pm. Standing alongside the BNP was quite an intimidating experience as there was a constant flow of their supporters to make sure there was an overt presence at the polling station. At least two had portable phones and were keeping in touch with other groups.

We were videoed from a car driving past slowly - obviously BNP - and there were two minibuses with 8-10 men which drove by regularly, apparently ready and

on call to move in if there was any "activity". There wasn't any chanting, stone-throwing, etc, but the feeling of being watched and sized-up was fairly disconcerting.

There was a clear effect on many voters who deliberately approached the polling station from the opposite side of the road so that they could cross and go directly into the entrance without having to walk past the groups on the pavement to the side of the station.

The police did keep everyone 15 yards from the entrance but they didn't seem to mind chatting to the BNP at times. Quite a few

local white working-class voters did pass and chat to or acknowledge in a friendly way the BNP.

Two cars drove by hooting and drivers made Nazi salutes through the windows. For a time, just before I left, I was on my own for about 15 minutes with four BNP alongside - not a comfortable feeling since I was obviously handing out Labour Party leaflets, but a minibus arrived organised from Oxford House with Kumar, one white woman and about eight Bengali youth.

They all stood right next to the BNP and changed the balance dramatically."

on polling day



**Kicked out:
Former BNP
councillor
Derek Beackon
with Lady Jane
Birdwood,
writer and
distributor of
antisemitic
literature**

Intimidation at the polling stations

"With two colleagues I went to a primary school in Malabar Road where we had heard there were many members of the BNP hanging around outside.

When we got there, they must have left because there were only two BNP members handing out leaflets to voters. There were several members of the ANL and other Labour voters so we went to the Labour Party committee rooms to see if my car was needed to escort anyone to a polling station.

It was, so my colleagues went out to knock up canvassed Labour supporters and I was sent to pick up a young Asian woman who was afraid to go to the polling station alone. When I arrived, there were loads more BNP. Near the gate of the polling station there were about five or six, then further down the road there was a minibus and about five or six standing just beside it. Among them was Richard Edmunds. He was being interviewed by a sound crew – I think from the BBC.

On the corner of the road you had to walk down in order to vote, there was another group of BNP members standing around. In total there were about 15 of them in sight of the polling station. That was very intimidating: just

because they stared. They all turned and stared at the car, at me and at the woman. She told me how her husband had been attacked quite recently.

After I got back from taking her home, I stood outside the polling station distributing Labour Party leaflets and taking down people's polling numbers. It was during this time that one of the groups of fascists brought out a tripod and camera and started taking photographs of people. Although they were quite a distance away it was a massive camera with a zoom lens.

A woman from the ANL complained about this to the two police outside the polling station. It had been happening earlier too. The police said they were going to do nothing about it. I think their reason was that they said they were far enough away from the gates.

Before I left, a new group of Labour supporters arrived to relieve their colleagues. Several were black women and I heard the BNP members making racist comments and jokes between themselves and laughing. It was a horrible atmosphere and I was glad to be going – particularly since I was now convinced they had both my photograph and my car registration number."

Nazis scatter at York Hall

At the Tower Hamlets election count at York Hall, Bethnal Green, on 5 May, we saw an Anti-Nazi League demonstration that was poorly attended and seemed even more weak and passive than usual.

As militant anti-fascists reached the area, it soon became clear that those on the demonstration has no strategy to stop the fascists coming in and out of the area.

Armed with extremely flimsy placards, the ANL were happy to stay "safely" behind two rows of barriers, where the police had put them, and shout "police protect the fascists" to their hearts content.

Meanwhile, on the positive side, small groups of combative anti-fascists remained outside the police cordons for most of the evening and were able to intercept a group of more than 20 fascists who came steaming into Cambridge Heath Road to confront the demonstration.

They lasted just seconds, most running straight back to where they had just come from – down Roman Road. At least one ended up needing hospital treatment.

The events of the evening showed that it is still possible, despite a large police presence, to "no platform" the fascists if smallish groups work closely together on the street.

This isn't squadism – it's just recognition that unless stewarding is taken seriously, people on our side will get hurt and not come again to an anti-fascist mobilisation.

It has to be said that most of the ANLers stayed behind police lines because they didn't feel safe straying out of the immediate area, not because it was a good place to demonstrate.

As Anti-Fascist Action often proved (and sometimes still do), it's no good doing anything unless you've got the confidence that your side will win in a confrontation. Anything less is dishonest, dangerous and irresponsible.

Colin Roach Centre

The Colin Roach Centre is financially independent. Money is raised at fundraising events and through a membership scheme. If you support the work of HCDA and the Colin Roach Centre, please join by sending a standing order form to your bank and sending us your name and address so we can put you on our mailing list and keep you informed of events.

Full membership of the Colin Roach Centre costs £10 a month waged and £3 unwaged. This entitles you to free or cost price use of all its resources - computers, photocopying, fax, etc. **Supporter membership** costs £5 a month.

STANDING ORDER FORM

To Bank (name of your bank)

Address

Please pay Girobank PLC, Bootle, Merseyside, G1R 0AA; sort code 72-00-00. For the credit of Colin Roach Centre, Account number 178029300.

The sum of £ Amount in words

Commencing and thereafter every

Account to be debited (ie Current)

Signature(s)

..... Date

The Colin Roach Centre, 10a Bradbury Street,
London N16 8JN.

Telephones: HCDA 071-249 0193; TUSU 071-249
8086; LGFG 071-241 4071.

Fax: 071-249 8086.

Working For Anti-Fascist **UNITY**



If the history of Anti-Fascist struggle teaches one thing, it is the crucial importance of working class unity against fascism. In 1933, sectarian divisions between German Anti-Fascists allowed Hitler to walk into power virtually unopposed. Similarly in the Spanish Civil War a few years later, Franco's victory was made possible partly by the divisions which split the Republican movement. These and other such lessons leave us a clear and unambiguous message. When fascism begins to win mass support, it can only be stopped if all anti-fascists are able to put aside their differences and unite for this specific task.

With this in mind, one can only view the current state of the anti-fascist movement in this country with some dismay, for it is anything but united. Currently there exist at least three national organisations. All initiate their own separate anti-fascist activities and give little or no support to the others. Such a situation is as serious as it is absurd. Contained within it are the seeds of past disasters. This leaflet is not about who is to blame - right now, we need to call for one movement, which can unite all those who wish to oppose the rise of fascism, on a principled and democratic basis.

This leaflet has been produced by a grouping of anti-fascist activists - individuals and members of groups - who have come together for this task. We are not claiming to be the organisation that is needed, rather we are working together to see the united movement established. We will continue to support all genuine anti-fascist activities, regardless of which group has initiated them, whilst at the same time continuing to agitate for the building of a genuine united movement. We invite all anti-fascists who agree with this aim, to contact us and assist us in this task.

All of us claim to be in agreement on fascism; we are all against it. But, clearly, the united, democratic, anti-fascist movement won't happen overnight. In the meantime, in every town, everytime there is a major fascist march or rally, an ad-hoc committee should be set up in order to plan tactics and organise opposition on the day. Joint stewards' groups should be set up, not only to make sure our side is well organised and defended, but also to try and make sure that fascist events do not go ahead.

The sooner we organise together, the better. If you are in a group such as ARA, ANL, YRE, or AFA, urge them to unite now in action with all other anti-fascists and smash fascism - wherever it rears its ugly face.

Contact: Unity Group at Box 24, 136 Kingsland High St, London E8.

Strike Back

A reply to Searchlight

April 25 1994

Dear Searchlight,

I have been instructed by a recent members' meeting to write to you regarding the article you carried in the January 1994 edition entitled "Entrapping the young" and referring to Tony Haughian.

Tony is a member of the Colin Roach Centre, which comprises Hackney Trade Union Support Unit, Hackney Community Defence Association, Hackney Lesbian and Gay Pride Festival Group and Hackney Anti-Fascist Collective.

Everyone is mystified and angry as to why such an article has appeared and we believe that unless you clarify and justify your claims then Tony is, at least, due a public and written apology, printed in a future copy of Searchlight.

We believe that there is a duty on Searchlight to answer the following:

1. Which Danish and Swedish anti-fascists have been alarmed by Tony and by what activities?
2. As Tony has been actively involved in the anti-fascist struggle for many years (over 10 years at least), what exactly does the term "alleged anti-fascist" mean? Is Tony an anti-fascist or not and if the answer is not then what is he? Is he a fascist or a police agent, for example? We believe that there is a duty to explain exactly what you mean.
3. Which young anti-fascists has he apparently been encouraging to carry out acts of violence, particularly

against non-fascist targets? (And which non-fascist targets are you talking of?) We believe that if you have got any facts then you should print them – failure to do so means that you are simply engaging in an unjustified smear campaign.

4. To whom has Tony said that BNP murdered his family? Facts please.

We are also disgusted with many other aspects of the article which is full of you own prejudices against people who are forced to squat, unemployed people, and people who have been or are in mental institutions.

We note that your article attacking Tony Haughian appears not long after he was attacked and badly injured by Combat 18 members at Old Street when he was returning from the Joy Gardner demonstration in August of last year.

As you are aware he was set upon by a large gang, kicked unconscious and had a paving stone thrown at his head. The fascists have, since then, used their publications to request details on his whereabouts and they have made clear that this is so they can attack him again.

Tony Haughian, probably more so than at any time, needs the support of the whole anti-fascist movement. By your actions you are putting him in additional danger and we believe that you should, and must, either back up your article with facts or issue a full and written apology. We look forward to a proper reply.

Mark Metcalf, on the instructions of Colin Roach Centre members

TAKE PRECAUTIONS ON DEMOS

Adopting a No Platform position involves recognising that fighting fascism can be dangerous. Some of our activity may take place on violent and heavily policed demonstrations and it is important we are prepared.

- Go as a group
- Don't wear badges or stickers on the way to or from the demonstration
- Wear sensible clothes, especially sensible shoes
- Take a legal helpline number (They are usually available from stewards but have your own as well)
- If you witness an arrest, note the officers' numbers
- Write down details of the arrest as soon as possible
- If you are arrested, demand a solicitor and give no unnecessary information (To be granted bail, you are obliged to give only your name and address)
- Leave as a group and don't hang around the area.

■ For more information about Hackney Anti-Fascist Collective write to: PO Box 24, 136-138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS